

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG PRIORITY

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AMEMBASSY TAIPEI PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY

CINCPAC FOR POLAD PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 0163

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINT, CH

SUBJ: REUTERS STORY ON TENG'S RETURN AS FIRST VICE CHAIRMAN

1. REUTERS RAN STORY JANUARY 23 DATELINED PEKING STATING THAT NONOFFICIAL CHINESE TOLD WESTERN DIPLOMAT THAT TENG HSIAO-PING WOULD RETURN AS FIRST VICE CHAIRMAN OF PARTY. CHINESE SOURCE INDICATED THAT BRIEFINGS HAD BEEN GIVEN TO ALL CHINESE ON SUBJECT.

2. QUERIED ON MORNING OF JANUARY 24 BY SEVERAL JOURNALISTS, FOREIGN MINISTRY INFORMATION DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN IMMEDIATELY TERMED STORY--INCLUDING BOTH TENG'S APPOINTMENT AND ONGOING BRIEFINGS--"COMPLETELY UNFOUNDED."

3. THE SOURCING FOR THE REUTERS STORY STRIKES US AS RATHER DUBIOUS IN ANY EVENT; A DOMESTIC EMPLOYEE OF
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A BRITISH DIPLOMAT SUPPOSEDLY VOLUNTEERED THE INFORMATION.

4. THE JAPANESE HAVE A SEPARATE VERSION OF THE STORY, HOWEVER, WHICH IS PROBABLY NEARER THE TRUTH. ACCORDING TO THEIR INFORMATION, RECENT BRIEFINGS TO OFFICIAL-LEVEL CHINESE HAVE REFERRED TO TENG AS "COMRADE," INDICATED THAT HIS REHABILITATION AND RETURN IS BUT

"A MATTER OF TIME," AND STIPULATED THAT HE WOULD BE
GIVEN THE POST OF VICE PREMIER (OR POSSIBLY FIRST VICE PREMIER).

5. COMMENT: GIVEN THE EMPHASIS LAID BY PRC MEDIA
AND CHINESE OFFICIALS ON CHAIRMAN MAO'S UNIQUE PERSONAL
INSERTION OF THE WORD "FIRST" BEFORE HUA KUO-FENG'S
TITLE OF PARTY VICE CHAIRMAN IN ORDER TO DESIGNATE HIM
AS SUCCESSOR, THE BESTOWING OF THE TITLE "FIRST VICE
CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY" ON TENG--WHO IS NEARLY TWO
DECADES OLDER THAN HUA--SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY. IF DONE,
IT WOULD IMMEDIATELY RAISE EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS
ABOUT HUA'S TENURE IN THE JOB.
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